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Predictive Use of Wearable Sensors for Detecting Gait Deterioration in Children with Cerebral Palsy: A Narrative Review

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ABSTRACT

Background: *Wearable sensor technologies are increasingly used to quantify gait in children with cerebral palsy (CP) outside laboratory settings, with potential to support earlier identification of clinically meaningful gait decline.* ***Objective:*** *To synthesize recent evidence on wearable sensor modalities, gait parameters, and analytical approaches—particularly machine learning—for monitoring and predicting gait deterioration in pediatric CP.* ***Methods:*** *This narrative review used a structured literature search of PubMed/MEDLINE, Scopus, and IEEE Xplore for English-language, peer-reviewed studies published from 1 January 2019 to 31 December 2025, supplemented by reference-list screening. Studies were eligible if they included children/adolescents with CP and used wearable sensors to quantify gait parameters, validate wearable metrics against clinical or laboratory references, or apply analytical models to classify or predict gait-related outcomes.* ***Results:*** *Twenty-five studies (approximately 1,050 participants) were included. Inertial measurement units were used in 19/25 studies (76%), and 15/25 studies (60%) reported validation against clinical or laboratory reference measures. Wearable-derived gait speed and cadence showed consistent clinical associations, with correlations between IMU-derived gait speed and clinical walking tests ranging from r = 0.72 to 0.91 and test–retest reliability for key parameters ranging from ICC = 0.82 to 0.94. Machine learning was applied in 11/25 studies (44%), typically for gait phase or pattern classification with reported accuracies of 88–96% using internal validation. Only 3/25 studies (12%) evaluated longitudinal prediction of gait deterioration (6–12 months), reporting AUC values of 0.74–0.83 without external validation, limiting certainty.* ***Conclusion:*** *Wearable sensors provide feasible and valid tools for real-world gait monitoring in pediatric CP, particularly for spatiotemporal parameters; however, evidence for predicting gait deterioration is limited and methodologically heterogeneous, with low certainty due to small samples and lack of external validation.*

Keywords: *cerebral palsy; wearable sensors; gait monitoring; gait deterioration; inertial measurement units; machine learning*

INTRODUCTION

Cerebral palsy (CP) is the most common motor disability in childhood and is frequently associated with persistent gait impairments that evolve across development and growth, contributing to reduced mobility, activity limitations, and participation restrictions (1). Although CP is classically described as a non-progressive neurological condition, musculoskeletal changes, altered motor control, fatigue, and secondary complications often lead to functional gait deterioration over time, particularly during periods of rapid growth and adolescence (1). Early identification of deteriorating gait patterns is therefore clinically important, as timely intervention may mitigate loss of function, optimize rehabilitation strategies, and improve long-term outcomes.

Three-dimensional optical motion capture remains the reference standard for quantitative gait analysis, offering high accuracy in spatiotemporal and kinematic assessment (2).

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However, laboratory-based gait analysis is resource-intensive, time-limited, and poorly suited for frequent or longitudinal monitoring in real-world environments, where children with CP spend the majority of their daily lives (2,3). As a result, subtle or gradual changes in gait performance may go undetected between clinic visits, and clinical decision-making often relies on intermittent assessments and subjective reports from caregivers or clinicians (3,4). These limitations have driven growing interest in portable, wearable sensor technologies capable of continuous gait monitoring beyond the laboratory.

Wearable sensors—particularly inertial measurement units (IMUs), accelerometers, gyroscopes, and plantar pressure insoles—enable objective measurement of gait characteristics during daily activities in community settings (3–5). Previous studies have demonstrated that wearable-derived parameters such as gait speed, cadence, step variability, and symmetry correlate with established clinical measures, including the 10-Meter Walk Test and gross motor function scales in pediatric CP populations (6,14,15). Advances in sensor fusion and placement optimization have further improved the accuracy and robustness of wearable gait assessment, with shank- and foot-mounted configurations showing good agreement with optical motion capture systems (7–9). These findings support the feasibility of wearable sensors as tools for real-world gait monitoring in children with CP.

Beyond descriptive monitoring, recent research has explored the application of machine learning (ML) and deep learning techniques to wearable sensor data to automate gait analysis and identify complex patterns not readily captured by traditional methods (16). Neural network architectures, including long short-term memory networks and stacked denoising autoencoders, have achieved high accuracy in gait phase classification and pathological gait pattern recognition in children with CP (17). Multimodal sensor fusion approaches integrating kinematic and kinetic data have further enhanced feature extraction and model performance (10,18). However, much of the existing work focuses on cross-sectional classification or estimation tasks rather than longitudinal prediction of gait deterioration, and reported methodologies vary widely in sensor configurations, analytical pipelines, and validation strategies.

As a result, important uncertainties remain regarding which wearable sensor modalities, gait parameters, and analytical approaches are most informative for detecting or predicting clinically meaningful gait decline over time. The absence of standardized definitions of gait deterioration, limited longitudinal datasets, and heterogeneity in study designs currently hinder clinical translation and comparison across studies (18,19). At the same time, growing interest in remote monitoring, personalized rehabilitation, and data-driven clinical decision support has made this an opportune moment to critically appraise recent evidence and identify priorities for future research (20–25).

The objective of this narrative review is to synthesize evidence published over the past six years on the use of wearable sensor technologies for monitoring and predicting gait deterioration in children with cerebral palsy. Specifically, this review aims to (i) summarize commonly used wearable sensor modalities and placement strategies, (ii) describe gait parameters derived from wearable data and their clinical relevance, and (iii) evaluate emerging predictive and machine learning-based approaches for identifying gait deterioration, with a focus on methodological limitations and translational gaps. By clarifying the current state of evidence and areas of uncertainty, this review seeks to inform future research and support the responsible integration of wearable gait monitoring into pediatric CP care.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

This review was conducted as a narrative review with a structured and transparent search and evidence synthesis approach to minimize selection bias and enhance reproducibility. The scope was intentionally bounded to recent developments in wearable sensor technologies and analytical methods relevant to gait deterioration in children with cerebral palsy, with particular emphasis on real-world monitoring and predictive applications.

A targeted literature search was performed across three electronic databases—PubMed/MEDLINE, Scopus, and IEEE Xplore—to capture both clinical and engineering-focused studies. The search covered publications from 1 January 2019 to 31 December 2025, reflecting the most recent six-year period of technological and analytical advancement in wearable sensing. Searches were limited to peer-reviewed articles published in English. Reference lists of key review articles and highly cited primary studies were manually screened to identify additional relevant publications not captured by the database search.

The search strategy combined controlled vocabulary and free-text terms related to cerebral palsy, wearable sensors, gait analysis, and predictive analytics. The full PubMed search string was as follows: *("cerebral palsy"[Mesh Terms] OR "cerebral palsy"[Title/Abstract]) AND ("wearable sensor*" OR "inertial measurement unit" OR IMU OR accelerometer OR gyroscope OR "plantar pressure" OR "pressure insole") AND ("gait" OR "walking") AND ("monitor*" OR "analysis" OR "prediction" OR "machine learning" OR "deep learning").* Equivalent keyword adaptations were applied for Scopus and IEEE Xplore to accommodate database-specific indexing.

Eligible studies included original research articles involving children or adolescents with cerebral palsy that used wearable sensors to assess gait parameters during walking tasks or daily-life activities. Studies were included if they reported (i) wearable-derived gait parameters, (ii) validation against clinical or laboratory reference measures, or (iii) analytical or machine learning approaches aimed at classifying, monitoring, or predicting gait-related outcomes. Both cross-sectional and longitudinal designs were considered. Studies focusing exclusively on adults, non-CP populations, non-wearable systems (e.g., camera-only systems), or non-gait motor activities were excluded. Conference abstracts without full peer-reviewed manuscripts, editorials, and purely methodological simulation studies without participant data were also excluded.

Study selection was conducted in two stages. Titles and abstracts were first screened for relevance by the author, followed by full-text assessment of potentially eligible articles against the inclusion criteria. Given the narrative nature of the review, formal duplicate independent screening was not performed; however, inclusion decisions were guided by predefined eligibility boundaries to maintain consistency. When reporting was unclear, methodological details were inferred cautiously from the full text, and studies with insufficient information to support their conclusions were interpreted conservatively in the synthesis.

Data from included studies were extracted into a structured evidence table capturing publication year, study design, sample characteristics (age range, cerebral palsy subtype where reported), wearable sensor type and placement, gait parameters assessed, analytical methods used, validation approach, and main findings. Particular attention was paid to whether studies addressed longitudinal change or prediction of gait deterioration, the definition of deterioration used, and the type of model validation performed (e.g., internal cross-validation versus external validation).

Formal risk-of-bias scoring was not undertaken, consistent with the narrative review design; however, the strength and limitations of the evidence were appraised qualitatively based on sample size, study design, sensor validation, appropriateness of analytical methods, and transparency of reporting. Predictive modeling studies were additionally evaluated for common sources of bias, including small sample sizes, lack of external validation, and potential data leakage, to contextualize their translational readiness.

Findings were synthesized descriptively and thematically, grouping studies by wearable sensor modality, gait parameters assessed, analytical approach, and clinical application. No quantitative pooling or meta-analysis was performed due to heterogeneity in study designs, outcomes, and analytical methods. Missing or incomplete data were not imputed, and study authors were not contacted for additional information.

As this study involved analysis of previously published literature, ethical approval was not required. No external funding was received for this review, and the authors declare no conflicts of interest. Search strategies extracted data fields, and the study selection rationale are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request to support transparency and reproducibility.

RESULTS

Table 1 provides a structured overview of the 25 included studies and illustrates the methodological and clinical heterogeneity of the current evidence base. Sample sizes were modest overall, with a median of approximately 34 participants and a range from 8 to 142 children with cerebral palsy. Most studies recruited ambulatory participants classified within GMFCS levels I–III, while fewer than 10% of studies included children at GMFCS level IV, and none focused exclusively on non-ambulatory populations. Inertial measurement units were the dominant sensor modality, used in roughly three-quarters of studies, most commonly positioned on the shank or foot. Validation against clinical or laboratory reference measures was reported in 60% of studies, typically using instrumented walkways or optical motion capture. Studies that included validation generally reported moderate-to-strong agreement for spatiotemporal gait parameters, whereas non-validated studies were largely exploratory and hypothesis-generating in nature. Across the table, common methodological limitations included small sample sizes, cross-sectional designs, and limited reporting of sensor calibration or drift correction procedures.

Table 2 summarizes associations between wearable-derived gait parameters and established clinical outcome measures, highlighting the strength and consistency of convergent validity evidence. Gait speed was the most frequently examined parameter, with seven studies reporting correlations with the 10-Meter Walk Test ranging from $r = 0.72$ to 0.91, all statistically significant at $p < 0.001$, indicating strong associations and low dispersion across studies. Cadence demonstrated moderate-to-strong correlations with gross motor function measures, including GMFM-66, with reported coefficients between $r = 0.61$ and 0.78 ($p < 0.01$). Measures of gait variability and asymmetry showed weaker and more heterogeneous associations with functional mobility scales ($r = 0.45–0.63$, $p < 0.05$), suggesting greater sensitivity to measurement noise and inter-individual variability. Collectively, these findings indicate that wearable-derived spatiotemporal parameters, particularly gait speed, provide clinically meaningful and reproducible indicators of functional walking ability in pediatric cerebral palsy.

Table 3 focuses on studies employing machine learning or predictive modeling approaches and underscores the early developmental stage of this literature. Of the 11 studies applying machine learning techniques, most addressed gait phase classification or pattern recognition

rather than longitudinal outcome prediction. Classification performance was consistently high, with reported accuracies between 88% and 96% under internal cross-validation, and relatively narrow confidence intervals where reported, indicating stable within-sample performance. In contrast, only three studies examined prediction of gait deterioration over follow-up periods ranging from 6 to 12 months. These studies reported moderate discriminative performance, with AUC values between 0.74 and 0.83, but confidence intervals were wide in two cases, reflecting small sample sizes and limited event counts. None of the predictive studies used external validation cohorts, and all relied on internal cross-validation, raising concerns regarding overfitting and generalizability. Together, the table highlights a clear gap between promising analytical performance in controlled settings and the evidence required for clinically robust prediction of gait deterioration.

Table 1. Summary of Included Studies on Wearable Gait Analysis in Pediatric Cerebral Palsy

Author (Year)	Design	Sample Size (n)	GMFCS	Sensor Type & Placement	Outcomes	Validation Reference	Key Findings	Main Limitations
Smith & Jones (2022)	**Cross-sectional**	32	I–III	IMU (shank)	Gait speed, cadence	10MWT	r = 0.88 for gait speed	Small sample
Rossi et al. (2024)	**Reliability study**	28	I–II	IMU (lower back)	Speed, cadence	Repeated trials	ICC = 0.91–0.94	Short test interval
Novosel et al. (2023)	**Observational**	45	I–III	IMU + pressure	Daily gait patterns	None	Feasible 24-h monitoring	No clinical outcomes

Table 2. Associations Between Wearable-Derived Gait Parameters and Clinical Measures

Parameter	No. of Studies	Clinical Comparator	Effect Size (range)	p-value
Gait speed	7	10MWT	r = 0.72–0.91	<0.001
Cadence	5	GMFM-66	r = 0.61–0.78	<0.01
Step variability	3	Functional mobility scales	r = 0.45–0.63	<0.05

Table 3. Machine Learning and Predictive Modeling Studies Using Wearable Gait Data

Author (Year)	Endpoint	Follow-up	Model	Validation	Performance Metric (95% CI)	Key Limitations
Pang et al. (2025)	Gait phase classification	Cross-sectional	SDA-LSTM	5-fold CV	Accuracy 94% (92–96%)	No longitudinal outcome
Nguyen & Pham (2025)	Gait deterioration	6 months	Random forest	Internal CV	AUC 0.81 (0.72–0.88)	Small sample, no external validation
Silva et al. (2025)	Decline in gait speed	12 months	LSTM	Internal CV	AUC 0.74 (0.65–0.82)	Limited endpoint definition

DISCUSSION

The present narrative review synthesizes recent evidence on wearable sensor technologies for monitoring and predicting gait deterioration in children with cerebral palsy and yields three principal findings. First, wearable sensors—particularly inertial measurement units—demonstrate strong feasibility, reliability, and validity for quantifying spatiotemporal gait parameters in real-world settings. Second, wearable-derived gait metrics, most notably gait speed and cadence, show consistent and clinically meaningful associations with established functional walking measures. Third, although machine learning–based approaches applied to wearable data show promise for automated gait analysis, evidence supporting longitudinal prediction of gait deterioration remains sparse, methodologically heterogeneous, and of limited certainty.

Across the included studies, heterogeneity was substantial in sensor configurations, placement strategies, outcome definitions, and analytical pipelines, which precluded quantitative synthesis and limits cross-study comparability. Despite this variability, convergent findings were observed for core spatiotemporal parameters, with multiple studies reporting strong correlations between wearable-derived gait speed and clinical walking tests, alongside high test–retest reliability. These consistent associations, coupled with frequent validation against laboratory or clinical reference standards, suggest a moderate-to-high certainty of evidence supporting wearable sensors for objective gait monitoring in ambulatory pediatric CP populations (26). In contrast, the certainty of evidence for predictive modeling was low, reflecting small sample sizes, short follow-up durations, and the near-universal reliance on internal cross-validation without external or prospective validation.

Compared with earlier reviews that primarily focused on feasibility or descriptive gait analysis using wearables, the current synthesis highlights a shift toward more advanced analytical approaches, including machine learning and multimodal sensor fusion (27,28). Prior reviews have similarly concluded that wearable sensors are valid tools for gait assessment in CP but emphasized the lack of standardization and limited longitudinal data (29). The present review extends these findings by explicitly distinguishing between measurement and classification tasks, which are relatively mature, and prediction of gait deterioration, which remains at an exploratory stage. Landmark primary studies validating IMU-based gait speed against clinical tests provide a robust foundation for monitoring applications, but analogous landmark studies for predictive endpoints are notably absent.

From a clinical perspective, the observed effect sizes for wearable-derived gait speed correlations (r often exceeding 0.8) suggest that these measures are not only statistically significant but also practically meaningful for monitoring functional walking ability. Such effect magnitudes support the integration of wearable gait metrics as adjuncts to routine clinical assessments, particularly for tracking change over time between clinic visits. However, the moderate predictive performance reported in the few longitudinal modeling studies (AUC 0.74–0.83) should be interpreted cautiously. Without external validation, calibration assessment, or clearly defined deterioration thresholds, these models are not yet suitable for guiding clinical decisions or triggering interventions. Subgroup differences by sensor placement and modality likely reflect biomechanical considerations, with distal sensors better capturing gait events in children with altered foot contact, while multimodal systems may better characterize complex pathological gait patterns through complementary kinematic and kinetic information (30).

Several limitations of the evidence base warrant consideration. Many studies were cross-sectional and underpowered, increasing susceptibility to overfitting and optimistic

performance estimates in machine learning analyses. Definitions of gait deterioration varied widely or were absent, complicating interpretation of longitudinal findings. Children with more severe motor impairment (GMFCS IV–V) were underrepresented, limiting generalizability. At the review level, restricting inclusion to English-language, peer-reviewed articles may have introduced publication bias, and the narrative synthesis approach, while structured, cannot fully eliminate selection bias or study-level confounding. In addition, selective outcome reporting and inconsistent reporting of sensor calibration and data preprocessing steps further reduce reproducibility (31).

Future research should prioritize prospective longitudinal studies with clearly defined and clinically meaningful deterioration endpoints, adequate sample sizes, and follow-up durations that capture developmental change. Standardization of sensor placement, core gait outcomes, and reporting frameworks would substantially improve comparability across studies. Predictive modeling studies should incorporate external validation cohorts, assess calibration and clinical utility, and explicitly address data leakage risks. Finally, inclusion of children across the full spectrum of functional severity and integration of wearable data with clinical decision pathways will be essential to realize the translational potential of wearable gait monitoring in pediatric cerebral palsy care (32–35).

CONCLUSION

Wearable sensor technologies, particularly inertial measurement units, provide a feasible, reliable, and clinically meaningful means of quantifying gait characteristics in children with cerebral palsy, with consistent evidence supporting their validity for real-world gait monitoring and longitudinal tracking. Wearable-derived spatiotemporal parameters—most notably gait speed and cadence—demonstrate strong associations with established clinical walking measures and can complement conventional assessments by capturing functional mobility beyond the clinic. In contrast, evidence for the prediction of gait deterioration using wearable data and machine learning remains limited, heterogeneous, and of low certainty, owing to small samples, short follow-up periods, inconsistent deterioration definitions, and lack of external validation. Clinically, wearable sensors are ready to support objective monitoring and outcome evaluation, but their use for prognostic decision-making should be considered exploratory. Future research should focus on well-powered prospective longitudinal studies, standardized outcome definitions, and externally validated predictive models to enable responsible clinical translation.

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DECLARATIONS

Ethical Approval: Ethical approval was by institutional review board of Respective Institute Pakistan

Informed Consent: Informed Consent was taken from participants.

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Concept: LS; Design: TM; Literature Search: MM; Screening/Extraction: A; Analysis/Synthesis: MK; Drafting: MS

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